

January 2009 HKNHS Outing – “Outward Bounds”



Castle Peak viewed from the Stream Valley

Our full bus load had, for various reasons, dwindled to 18 members and guests for this venture into the rarely visited North-western area of Hong Kong. However the weather was bright and sunny, if a little hazy and we set forth towards Tuen Mun. The coach set us down by the Tsing Shan Monastery on the eastern slopes of Castle Peak. This is one of the three oldest monasteries in Hong Kong, said to be founded by an Indian Monk known as Pei Du (or Pui To) who travelled in a ‘wooden cup’ (his name literally translates as ‘travelling in a cup’), over 1500 years ago. The monastery is currently under extensive restoration and has been used as a setting in many Hong Kong films (“Enter The Dragon” being one of them). The group had an amble around these serene settings and some chatted to the security guard who was a “chippy” in Warrington, Lancashire before taking his present job!



The Ridge Roof of the Tsing Shan Monastery

View of the landscape from Castle Peak

From the monastery, the path up to the summit takes the form of regular steps up to about the half-way mark, then very irregular and steep steps to a pagoda delightfully perched on a ridge between the two peaks, a welcome stop with wonderful views both eastward and westward, after tackling the 583 metres climb in bright sunshine. After refreshment, we took a path heading northwards, giving wonderful views over this stark but stunningly beautiful landscape. The path is quite treacherous in places as the eroded volcanic rock has resulted in steep, scree covered trails which makes the trail not suitable for the feint-hearted. This entire area is not part of the Country Parks of Hong Kong but is still designated as a Firing Range area. It is not uncommon along the trail to still find spent bullet cases and items of rusting army machinery. In fact our lunch stop took place beside some WD metal-decking on the top of one of the smaller hills in the area.



Descending Castle Peak (thanks to Peter Stuckey for this photo)

After lunch, we continued our descent towards the coast of Deep Bay by following what started as a good track, but quickly deteriorated to a narrow path beside a treacherously eroded deep ravine. Thankfully, such hardships did not deter the good nature of our group as we worked our way to one of the stream beds in the valley. We crossed one stream by boulder-hopping and followed an overgrown path for a short distance to the conjunction of two streams. After crossing one of the streams, we stopped to enjoy the wonderful scenery in this valley.



One of the beautiful stream pools in the valley *The "pitcher" of Nepenthes Mirabilis*

The trail follows the main stream down to the sea, passing many tranquil pools on the way, sometimes by following the stream bed, sometimes by a path by the side of the stream. It is in this area that the Hong Kong Pitcher Plant (*Nepenthes mirabilis*) grows and we saw several examples, some still with the long raceme of flowers showing (quite unusual as they flower in November). The pitchers are formed from leaf tendrils and secrete a honey-like fluid to attract insects, which become entrapped within the slippery inner surface of the pitcher and are decomposed by enzymes of the plant. As we stopped to admire one of these plants, a cacophony of sound was heard as an unlikely pack of moto-cross motorcycles were bizarrely attempting to ride over the rocks in the stream bed! It certainly shattered the peace of a Sunday afternoon. We continued onward down the path, having to traverse a wooden bridge that needed some immediate repair – it was useful to have my hammer and a few nails with me! I was concerned about the group safely negotiating this obstacle but I need not have worried, everyone managed extremely well. Eventually the path meets a metalled road but we followed a delightful path that leads to the very rural village of Ha Pak Nai, passing some well-tended vegetable and fruit gardens – some just ripening strawberries looked very tempting! On arriving at the village, our group settled to a welcome beverage or two at one of the small hostleries and drank to our negotiating an "Outwards Bound" course safely! I must say, I was relieved! This really is an outstandingly scenic, but not easy, walk.

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